

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 17, 2008

The Honorable Robert A. Sturgell
Acting Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
8000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Acting Administrator Sturgell:

Recently more pilots have alleged that they are being intimidated by their employers into flying with inadequate fuel supplies in order to save their airline companies money. As a former pilot, you should know that this is a frightening claim--airlines should never endanger public safety in order to improve their bottom line.

The employee organization which represents over 5,000 US Airways pilots claims that their members have been threatened with termination if they do not reduce fuel levels. Senior pilots in particular have been singled out for "fuel conservation training." Last year, another airline issued an internal bulletin warning pilots that "adding fuel indiscriminately ... reduces profit sharing and possibly pension funding."

Skyrocketing fuel prices are putting our airlines in a very difficult financial situation, but the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) must make sure that passenger safety remains paramount, even in the face of financial distress by the airline companies. This is an issue we raised with you previously, and we are concerned that the steps the FAA took in response to our letters last year are insufficient.

In response to a letter from Senator Menendez, you indicated on January 30, 2008, that the FAA had identified the problems and misunderstandings which led to a surge in the number of reported "low fuel landings" in 2007. In April, in response to a request from Senator Lautenberg, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Inspector General issued a report on low fuel landings. The report expressed concern that airline bulletins "might put pressure on pilots ... to carry insufficient amounts of fuel" and described the steps the FAA was taking to improve communications procedures and data collection. But the report concluded that it was "too soon to determine the effectiveness of the FAA's actions." Mr. Sturgell, you also assured us in person that the FAA took the low fuel landing problem seriously and that the FAA was effectively addressing this problem.

The claims of the US Airways pilots raise serious questions about the effectiveness of your approach.

We urge you to take immediate steps to make it clear to all airlines that the pilot has the final authority over how much fuel is on his or her plane, and to end any coercive practices by airline companies. We are also requesting a follow up report on what you have learned about low fuel

landings at Newark Liberty International Airport since you implemented improved reporting requirements.

FAA oversight is particularly important during a time of surging fuel prices, and we sincerely hope you will thoroughly investigate the claims made by the US Airline Pilots Association.

Sincerely Yours,



ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator

FRANK R. LAUTENBERG
United States Senator